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Metro Security Officers Marlon Valdez, Andrea Hess and James Pochick received commendations from the Operations Committee, Thursday, for their actions at an accident scene on the I-105 Freeway on June 7.



Photos by Ned Racine

## Traction Power Workers, Security Officers Rush to Aid Freeway Accident Victims



Christopher Lee, a traction power relief leader, and Floyd Paton, a traction power leader, used fire extinguishers from their Metro trucks to knock down a vehicle fire on June 7, 2007. Two who aided accident victims that morning are not shown: Donnie Davison, a traction power inspector, and Sergio Valle, a traction power inspector

- Seven-car crash kills one, throws quarter-mile of debris near Green Line Station

- Board's Operations Committee honors employees for their work at accident site

By NED RACINE

(July 20, 2007) Just before 4 a.m. on June, 7, fresh from working on the Metro Green Line, Floyd Paton and three of his Traction Power team members drove their work trucks east on the I-105 Freeway. More than half way through their shift, they were eager for lunch.

They never ate. Instead they discovered a hellish seven-car accident before them, just east of the 405 Freeway interchange, within a-quarter mile of the Green Line's Hawthorne station.

Car parts and glass were spread over a quarter mile of the I-105, covering five lanes of traffic, from the right shoulder to the HOV lane. One of the cars burned. One of the cars was T-boned.

Dazed vehicle occupants stood on the right shoulder. Other injured passengers needed to be moved to avoid further injury.

Spotting no emergency vehicle or personnel, Paton, a traction power leader, turned on his emergency light bar and directional flashers.

Using their trucks as barriers, Paton; Donnie Davison, a traction power inspector; Christopher Lee, a traction power relief leader, and Sergio Valle, another traction power inspector, rushed to assist.

Because of the early morning chaos they discovered, the Metro rescuers now find it difficult to construct a precise chronology of their efforts, but they began by pulling fire extinguishers from their trucks.

#### **A 'no-brainer' to rescue injured**

"It was a no-brainer to approach the vehicle whose engine compartment was in flames and help the driver who was unable to free himself," explained Paton, who found multiple dazed passengers in the accident zone.

"After [we] removed the mangled driver's-side door, Chris returned with the fire extinguisher and proceeded to extinguish the burning engine," Paton said. Then they extracted the male driver of the car, whose engine continued to smolder.

"Because of the driver's size, it took Sergio Valle, me and three others to remove the driver from his vehicle," Paton said. They laid the man on the freeway. A wall of stopped traffic now blocked the I-105.

Arriving minutes later, Metro Security Officer James Pochick took charge of the rescue and radioed for help. Pochick had been using the I-105 to travel between Green Line stations.

Officers Marlon Valdez and Andrea Hess responded quickly to Pochick's radio call and joined him in rescuing trapped passengers.

"Air was heavy with a beige/white smoke from the air bag explosives," Pochick recalled. "Several air bags were deployed." He described the accident area as a "post-battle war zone."

California Highway Patrol officers arrived at approximately 4:20 a.m. and two Los Angeles County Fire Department units rolled in soon after. Hess, Pochick and Valdez assisted CHP in creating a path for emergency rescue

vehicles. Floyd and Valle moved debris so tow trucks could enter the accident zone and remove the vehicles.

After he made his broadcast to the CHP, Pochick and the other security officers began checking the vehicles for evidence of a crime. Pochick found an unresponsive woman in one vehicle. He estimates that eight people, including members of the Traction Power team, were needed to pull her from the automobile.

**'I said a quick prayer'**

"I said a quick prayer," Pochick said. "We carried her about 50 yards." He recalls that the woman was very heavy, that the carriers worked as a team, like a caterpillar. He also remembers the heat from the burning car.

"The flames were following the fuel line under the car," Pochick said. "The passenger compartment was now on fire, and the trunk had begun to smoke." Lee and Paton jumped as the tires on the burning car began popping.

"We couldn't rouse her," Pochick said of the accident's only fatality. "It appeared she was alive, but we weren't able to revive her."

Because of his past experience with the Sheriff's Department, Pochick thinks the accident might have begun with a high-speed crash. "The spread pattern of the debris showed high impact," Pochick said.

It was about an hour before the fire was extinguished. "At that point we've done all the rescuing we could do," said Pochick, who recalls being on the radio a lot.

Lee and Paton were shocked and disgusted that several drivers tried to sneak through the traffic lane they helped create for emergency vehicles.

"It looked like a movie scene," Paton said. "I haven't seen anything close to that," Paton insisted, since he worked on relief efforts following Hurricane Katrina.

"Pay attention when you go through training for fire extinguisher or first aid training," Paton advises. "You never know."